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**Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Statement for the Record
H.R. 2 Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009
January 14, 2009**

Ms. McCOLLUM: Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my strong support for the *Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009* which will provide health care coverage for an additional 4.1 million children. Every child in America should have the right to healthcare, and this bill will bring us one step closer to that goal.

It is unacceptable that more than 47 million Americans, including 11% of American children, are without health insurance. Many hardworking families in Minnesota and across the national have lost their jobs, 2.6 million jobs in the last year. For every 1 percent increase in the unemployment rate, it is estimated that as many as 1.5 million Americans will lose their health care coverage. Expanding SCHIP will expand healthcare access for children at a time when too many American families are losing employer-sponsored health care. In these tough economic times, by helping families gain access to health care, we can give families the resources they need to give their children a better future.

The bill provides access to health care for 4 million children in America who are currently uninsured and preserves the coverage for all 7.1 million children currently covered by SCHIP. It is supported by 80% of the American people and over 300 organizations- including large majorities of Democrats, Independents and Republicans. The bill will extend coverage to 4.1 million additional low-income, uninsured children, covering a total of 11 million, and is likely to be one of the first signed into law by President Barack Obama. Last year, President Bush vetoed this vital health legislation that was passed by both chambers of Congress.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) was created in 1997 to provide health care coverage for children in families that earn too little to afford health insurance for their children themselves but too much to qualify for Medicaid. This bill will give states the resources and incentives necessary to reach and cover millions of uninsured children who are currently eligible, but not enrolled. It will also improve SCHIP benefits-ensuring dental coverage and mental health parity. This bill is largely paid for by increasing the tobacco tax by 61 cents, and will help keep kids and families healthy while saving taxpayers money in the long-run.

Expanding SCHIP is an important step forward, but we still must keep fight to make healthcare available and affordable for all Americans. As we reform our health care system, we need to focus on accessible, patient-centered care that focuses on wellness and prevention, while improving the quality of patient care. I will continue to fight to expand SCHIP and make healthcare available and affordable for Minnesota children and their parents.

As we start the new Congress and the new Administration I can think of no better way to bring about change than by investing in our children's health care. It is morally right, and crucial for the future of our nation. I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for this important bill.